

SPALDING & DISTRICT CIVIC SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

June 2015

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

IN RECENT NEWSLETTERS I have been appealing for people to join us on the Committee and share in the active work which is so important to us all. Titles and job descriptions can be flexible to suit the talents and offers of the individuals concerned, and I am delighted to welcome Mr. Arthur Ingram, whose special contribution will initially be in fundraising and publicity.

Indeed, when I was invited to join the Society and Committee, which must have been twenty years ago, it was so that I could present the views of cyclists. Cyclists are of course a mixed blessing, but, if more people came into Spalding town centre on their bicycles to do their shopping, then far more people would be able to get nearer to those shops at the same time, and air quality would be better, and perhaps we would have a more healthy-looking population. If town centre shopkeepers could encourage this, footfall in the town centre would surely increase.

Dependence on the motor car has given us a warped view of life. Because we feel safe behind our windscreens, we imagine that it must be unsafe if we are on a bicycle instead, and because we have taken our children to school by car on occasions, perhaps to protect them from heavy rain, we can turn this into a habit, and the many cycle-racks at our schools stand empty, and our children become less fit.

Another unrealistic expectation is that it is necessary to park directly in front of the shop one is visiting – yet motorists seem happy to park at some considerable distance from a supermarket provided it is in a supermarket carpark and they can see the building from the distant corner where they have managed to find a space. A classic example of how we can break our ingrained habits occurred when mainline trains were diverted through Spalding: there was nowhere near the expected chaos, because people put their brains into gear and made their townward journeys on different days.

On Friday, 12 June, the second annual Cycling Forum was held, chaired by our MP, the Rt.Hon.

John Hayes. The plan was to emphasise the health benefits of cycling, and contributors included the County and District Councils, the Road Safety Partnership, Sustrans, Spalding Cycling Club, and of course Pedals, the organisers of the operation. The other focus of the event was reporting on progress since last year.

Particular mention at the Forum was made of the highly successful cycling event held in Spalding on the first weekend in May. Not a single participant was put off by the heavy rain, and the enthusiasm shown by the primary school children gives hope for the future. Congratulations to Spalding Cycling Club for organising the event!

David Jones

For the diary

Sculptor

Joseph Hillier

will be talking about his work and his approach to the commission to create a work of public art for Hall Place. Illustrated. He looks forward to questions & discussion.

See Page 5

Tuesday, 14 July

7.00 pm

South Holland Centre (Functions Hall)
Spalding



BOOT'S FOR BOOTH

badly damaged by fire in the 1941 bombing raid on Spalding; hence the move across the street to undamaged premises, where the business remained.)

The question then is: on which side of the original Ashwell's did Booth lodge? To the left was the National Provincial Bank (later Woolworth's, also badly damaged in the 1941 raid); to the right Thomas Hardy, ironmonger. It seems unlikely that a bank would have taken in lodgers, but probability is not proof.

In moving to Bridge Street, Booth would unquestionably have chosen to lodge with a Methodist family. Therefore, if one could show that the bank manager, Thomas Beetham Scarborough, was an Anglican, the bank could be eliminated as Booth's lodgings. To cut a long and often frustrating search short – there were two Thomas Scarboroughs in Spalding at this time! – a paragraph in the *Free Press* for 12 May 1868 reports the funeral of Thomas Beetham Scarborough, Manager of the National Provincial Bank. The service was conducted by the Rev.E.Moore, who was the vicar of St.Mary and St.Nicolas Church, and the report adds that the bank manager had also been the church's organist. So, Mr.Scarborough was indeed an Anglican, and William Booth's landlord would therefore have been Thomas Hardy, ironmonger, to the right of Ashwell's – in the building that is now the three-storey part of Boot's Optician's. Remarkably, this building was spared both the German incendiaries and demolition when Westgate House (now Beale's) was extended in the 1990s – surviving to host a plaque that will commemorate William Booth's time in Spalding before he went on to found The Salvation Army with its world-wide membership.

THE OTHERS were easy – Rousseau, Frank Pick, Peter Connolly, Jimi Hendrix – but finding out just where to fix the plaque marking William Booth's time in Spalding was much harder. He spent two years here as Minister for the Free Methodist Church, 1852-4. From various letters we know he lodged in Red Lion Street – but which house? Houses in Spalding were not numbered until long after Booth's time. The postmen must have memorised the name of each householder on their particular 'walks'. Thus, in one letter Booth asks for some warmer clothing to be sent to him at "Mr.Green's, Baker, Red Lion Street". The 1851 Census certainly confirms the premises of one "Joshua Green" in the street, but because of the unsystematic order in which the enumerators recorded their findings it is impossible to identify the exact whereabouts of the premises.

Later Booth moved to Bridge Street. Here he lodged next door to Joseph Ashwell, printer, newsagent and stationer, and would pop into the shop every morning before breakfast to see what religious papers and magazines had come in. Older members will remember an Ashwell's newsagent's where the Bon Marché store now is. But Ashwell's was not always there. A 1920s postcard shows it on the opposite side of the street (*above*), on the site now occupied by the single-storey part of Boot's Optician's. (The Ashwell's shop on this site was

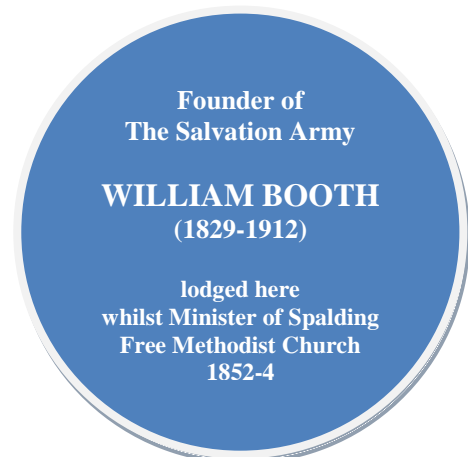
[*Detective work: thanks to Michael Elsdon's Aspects of Spalding books, Judy Chapman, Marion Brassington and the Editor.*]

□□ Unveiling of the plaque to □□
WILLIAM BOOTH

by
Colonel Bramwell Booth
(his great grandson)

For the diary

Saturday, 17 October 12.30
Boot's Optician's, Bridge Street, Spalding





IN MARCH the Council's planning committee threw out 14-0 an attempt to rob the youngsters of the Ladywood estate of their playing field. It was a notable victory – and the Society is proud to have played a part.

First put forward by the Environmental Services Department in 2011, the scheme to extend the Cemetery onto three-quarters of the Chiltern Drive Playing Field should never have left the starting-blocks. It flouted the Council's own planning policies and would have added further to Spalding's existing 44% shortfall of green leisure space. We immediately pointed this out and alerted Sport England to the threat, who accepted our invitation to visit the site and went on to oppose the scheme, as it was offering no fresh green playing space to compensate for the loss of the Chiltern Drive field.

Meanwhile, the Field was found to be subject to a covenant restricting its use solely to recreation. And that, one would have thought, was that.

Not so. The plan resurfaced again in 2014, accompanied by a ludicrous attempt to get round Sport England's objection by saying the Ladywood youngsters could go and play on the Park Close Playing Field (a good 20 minutes' dangerous walk away along busy main roads) – as if this was providing the *fresh* space Sport England had stipulated!

We objected again, the local residents presented a 100-signature petition, Sport England stood firm, a day before the Planning Committee met each member received a copy of the full case against the plan as set out in our February Newsletter, a resident and the Society's David Hill spoke at the meeting, and the Committee voted for common sense, enlightened planning and simple humanity, 14-0. A victory indeed. As Councillor Grocock put it: "I am for the living, not for the dead."

It is difficult to understand why the Environmental Services Department persisted in disregard of the crucial planning issues raised, and even more difficult to understand why the Planning Department supported the application. Local councils exist, after all, to make life better for their residents, not worse. It's this human perspective that can be seen in the letter one Ladywood lad wrote to the Planning Department: "In the summer months we love to go down our park which is a minute walk from our house to play football. Park Close would be a good 20 min walk and not safe for my younger brothers to go alone." Well, Daniel, summer's here; enjoy the field. You helped to make it safe.

□

But the Planning Committee's decision has ramifications that stretch far beyond simply saving the Chiltern Drive Playing Field. The refusal reads:

"... the proposal would lead to the unacceptable loss of recreational space ... given the overall deficit of public recreational space within Spalding and the lack of provision for acceptable alternative open space of similar value to residents within a reasonable alternative location." And goes on to list the local and national planning policies it would contravene. The members of the Planning Committee, it adds, considered the issue to be "fundamental".

This is the first time, so far as I can recall, that Spalding's serious lack of open green leisure space has been given as a material reason for refusing development. It sets a clear precedent. After all, it's not so very long ago that the sale of the Castle Field for housing was being considered and that of the Halley Stewart Field for retail development. They too now should be that little bit more safe.

John Charlesworth

PLANNING MATTERS

SHOW-PIECE ENTRANCE to Spalding from the south: **Gateway Business Park**. Sounds grand. Looked grand in the glossy photographs accompanying the original outline application: all sweeping modern architecture and eye-catching sculpture. What is emerging, however, as the detailed plans come in piecemeal, is rather different – incoherent, third-rate. Clone chain pub and hotel, with after-thought photo-voltaic panels and superfluous signs, pre-fab panels on a drive-thru eatery, conference centre like a seaside amusement arcade. And that's before all the mammoth produce-sheds arrive. It's difficult to see how it can be drawn together now into any sort of coherent whole.

Equally depressing are many of the **housing** applications, whether for rear storeroom and garage conversions or cramped new-build units. Most have little or no garden, no storage space (for domestic essentials, personal possessions or even clothes), and pokey combined kitchen/living rooms. Rabbit-hutch living. (GB's living-space standards are amongst the lowest in Europe.) Encouragingly, a housing development crammed into a yard in Little London and the battery-hen conversion submitted for the former Halmer Grange care home have both been refused.

Two singular occurrences from the last few months come next. First, a major unauthorised alteration to the historic **Constitutional Club** (Grade II* listed) in Broad Street, where a load-bearing wall was completely removed to enlarge the already spacious entrance hall without consultation or application for listed building consent. English Heritage was alerted by a whistle-blower, and the

subsequent retrospective application to SHDC refused. The wall has to be restored to its original state. All in all, a very expensive failure to observe planning legislation.

The other is the curious affair of the **Station Gates** pub. Change of use to a mini-market and take-away was granted, but a later application to enlarge a window into a large new door was (rightly) refused, as being destructive of the architectural harmony of this handsome, late Victorian building prominent on the edge of the Conservation Area. Unable now to get a large commercial fridge into the building, the new owner has removed another window and demolished part of a wall in order to insert the fridge, the wall and window to be restored afterwards. Fair enough, according to planning law. But when the fridge breaks down and a new one is required? Knock the wall down again, take out the window and then put them back again? One can't help feeling it would have been better to refuse change-of-use in the first place. After all, the area is awash with mini-markets and take-aways as it is.

In submitting comments on planning applications, we always try to suggest alternatives or improvements if appropriate, and welcome interesting or quality developments, large or small. One such is the decking and mooring platform recently approved for **The Moorings** on Commercial Road (formerly the Anchor Inn), which points not only towards more space for outdoor meals in the summer, but also towards possible boating on the river, which would be very welcome.

Planning Sub-Committee

PLAQUES FORCE FOUR

“SWINGING IN THE RAIN”: this report's had been ready for days – but it never rained! After a week of the gloomiest forecasts, we were favoured with hazy sunshine on 20 February instead, when Sounds Force Five unveiled the Jimi Hendrix plaque, before a gratifying crowd of well over 100 outside the Red Lion. Bearded, bald, grey, some of them, some from as far away as Bristol and Doncaster – fans who had been at the Barbeque '67 event, all with awakened memories of their youth 48 years ago. For others, younger, that event was only a tale.

After a two minutes' thrash of guitars, Christopher Thompson, who'd been 18 at the time, gave us some of his and his mates' memories; and Mick Peacey, Sounds Force Five's singer, stressed the 1967 concert's importance not just for Spalding but for the whole rock world as well. Before that May Bank Holiday festival in

the Bulb Auction, he said, rock groups saw themselves as rivals, “each looking for a market share, but after it they realised they could share the market”. And so Spalding paved the way for Monterey, Woodstock, Isle of Wight, Glastonbury, and the rest. As for Hendrix himself, he was a one-man explosion of “shock and awe, difficult to tell where the man ended and the guitar began.”

“It's memories that make us who we are,” as MP John Hayes said, rounding things off.

A great success for the Society then. Thanks to Robert West for mc-ing the unveiling, Sounds Force Five for doing it, Colin Ward, Nigel Wilkins and Councillor Liz Sneath for funding this fourth plaque, and member Judy Chapman for all her hard work behind the scenes.

Now for William Booth



MARKET ARTIST COMMISSIONED

SCULPTURE, murals, fountains – features that help to make so many town centres attractive and memorable. Sadly, Spalding seems to have been left behind somehow. But that could be set to change.

Several years ago the Society floated the idea of a number of public art works that would celebrate what was once a major feature of our town-centre life. Before the Cattle Market was built in 1938, the town centre *was* the cattle market. So, the Sheepmarket was full of sheep, cattle milled and bellowed in New Road, and pigs were penned off Red Lion Street, and so on, with the annual hiring fair in Hall Place in

May. The ‘Market Art’ proposal was to mark each of these locations with a corresponding public work of art.

It was the arrival of ‘Transported’ on the scene two years ago that offered hope that it could just possibly happen. (‘Transported’ is the local team overseeing an Arts Council grant of £2.5m to encourage greater public involvement in the arts in South Holland and Boston Borough.) They responded favourably to the idea from the start, and we were delighted to be able to announce at the AGM in March that Transported had agreed to fund the first of the ‘Market Art’ works.

Meanwhile, independently, the *Free Press* had been campaigning for “big ideas” to help regenerate the town centre, and its assessment panel later also embraced the ‘Market Art’ proposal. (Chaired by John Hayes, the panel contained representatives from both the county and district councils, Rotary, the Chamber of Commerce and the local press.) The proposal won the panel’s “all round support”. People do seem to like the idea.

So where are we now? A brief for the first commission was drawn up by Transported and 22 artists declared their interest. Five were short-listed, then interviewed in April by a small working group of representatives from Transported, the Society, SHDC and schools.

The winner was **Joseph Hillier**.

He chose the Hiring Fair. “I am intrigued by the hirings,” he said, “and the way people [were engaged for] their labour, and I think this is an amazing piece of recent history worth celebrating because, whilst it pays homage to the past, it also reminds us how we have changed as a society.” “As someone who grew up on a working farm I am aware how the agricultural heritage is rarely celebrated.”

Joseph Hillier has been Sculpture Tutor at Tulane University, New Orleans, and Visiting Lecturer in Fine Arts at Manchester Metropolitan University. He won the Arts Council’s ‘Year of the Artist’ Award in 2000 and more recently was a finalist for the National Sculpture Prize. In 2004 he was elected an associate member of the Royal British Society of

Sculptors. His 15 major public art commissions include works for the Environment Agency, Hull and Newcastle Universities, hospitals in Chelmsford and Gateshead, and various local authorities. He has three times had works exhibited in the Burghley House Sculpture Garden (2005, 2008, 2013).



He works mainly in metal. Some of his sculpture is enormous (*above*), some has a Gormley-like presence, while other pieces are smaller and more intimate (*below*).

He is currently developing the use of innovative digital technology in his work (*below*) and would



like to involve local people as models in the 3D scanning this incorporates; he would also hope to work with Geoff Taylor at the Chain Bridge Forge.

As part of his research, he is keen to talk to anyone with inherited family memories or stories of forebears involved in our local hiring fairs, whether as hirer or

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There seems to have been no end to the Johnson sisters' philanthropy. St. John's Church (1875) was built entirely at the expense of Mary Ann Johnson, along with the school and the vicarage; and in her will she left £1000 for the provision of coal for the poor of the parish. The architect was Robert Withers of London. Pevsner sniffily dismisses the building in five lines: "Wide, featureless nave interior." Parishioners regard the church rather more warmly.

EVENSONG was John Betjeman's favourite service and, importantly for St. John's, it was Peter Langford's, too. Yet when one thinks of evensong in the churches and cathedrals where it still occurs, one pictures a congregation clearly outnumbered by the clergy and choir. This is just what the BBC thought when not so long ago they announced their intention to axe the weekly live broadcast of choral evensong on Wednesday afternoons. To the amazement of the BBC, this proposal attracted so much outrage that not only was the live broadcast retained, but it was also decided to repeat it the following Sunday afternoon. The strength of feeling that evensong arouses is perhaps due to the fact that, when other forms of the liturgy seem constantly to be changing, the service of evensong has remained largely unaltered for over 400 years.

Peter Langford was a faithful member of the evensong congregation who enjoyed the devotional yet relaxed and sometimes informal atmosphere of the late Rev. Peter Garland's service and, when Peter

ST. JOHN'S



died, his bequest to St. John's funded a major re-ordering of the building, the work for which lasted the best part of a year.

As you enter the church, the difference between the old and the new is striking. The south door is no longer the main entrance; you enter directly from Hawthorn Bank through the west door under the tower. Glass inner doors allow the old solid doors to be left open so that the light may stream in. And warmth and light are the first things that you notice. Gone are the dark-stained pews and an innovative lighting system illuminates the pale wooden floor and movable seats. You quickly realise how flexible the space now is: it is ideal for the children of St. John's School next door, and musicians will love it because it has the best acoustic in the area – no more dark, cold and draughty events in the winter!

Of course the worship of God is the purpose of the church and St. John's is well-known for welcoming both traditionalists and modernists (see the numbers at the 9.30 service!). Not unnaturally therefore the eye is drawn towards the High Altar and especially its reredos – truly a masterpiece of restoration.

I hope Peter Langford would approve. I suspect that Miss Johnson would have liked it and even Pevsner perhaps have been a little less sniffy?

Joe Millington

◀ Page 5] as hired. He can be contacted on 01207 549757 or 07952 934515 or info@josephhillier.com.

It is not yet settled whether there should be a single figure or several smaller ones, with the final design to be agreed by mid-September. Meanwhile, Joseph will be talking about his work and the possibilities of the commission at the **South Holland Centre on Tuesday, 14 July, at 7.00 pm**. This is an opportunity not to be missed – to meet a sculptor of growing repute and by a word or thought perhaps help to shape his piece for Hall Place.

Needless to say, it is all very exciting. A challenge and a chance – to make a very public and positive change to

our town centre, enhancing its attractiveness for residents and visitor alike. It could be one of the most important initiatives the Society has ever undertaken, and we hope that all members will give it their strong and enthusiastic backing. Transported is providing most of the funding for this first commission, but the Society will need to make some contribution too. More of this when the design is finally settled. There will also be members who would like to be involved in some way, large or small, in the further stages of the complete project. Please get in touch with John Charlesworth or David Jones (contact details on p.8). Nothing ventured, nothing gained.



FACE LOOK

HOW MANY who regularly walk through the town centre could place the whereabouts of these carved heads, we wonder. There are about ten of them, all different, amongst various assorted salamanders and dragons on the front of ? A corner building virtually unchanged outside since it was put up in the 1890s and now listed ...? Yes, Lloyd's Bank. How much those faces must have watched! Coronation celebrations, Sunday school processions, the May hiring fairs, horses and carts giving way to cars and vans, the WW2 bombs that destroyed Pennington's department store, the dismantling of the Johnson Fountain to accommodate a roundabout, the choking

A16 traffic before the bypass, the Flower Parades.....

But it took the eye of a professional – Joseph Hillier (*see p.5*) on his first visit to the town in April – to notice that the heads were not all carved by the same hand. How bland and expressionless the faces of the king and the queen on the left, how blank their eyes, how stone-like; how full of character the faces on the right, wrinkles and frowns, smiles, how different the eyes, how human. Have a look when you're next in the Market Place. How many of the heads were the work of the first carver? How many the work of the second?

MUCH APPRECIATED

- **County Highways Department** – for replacing the three dead or moribund trees in Hall Place and the Market Place. The new ones in Hall Place are maidenhair trees (*Ginkgo biloba*), pictured, with leaves rather like the large broad, leaflets of the maidenhair fern. The trees are slow-growing, pollution-tolerant and very tough, and therefore particularly well suited to urban settings. Indeed, according to



one handbook, they are the only trees “able to grow well in the canyons between American skyscrapers”.

- The local **Conservative Group** – for their manifesto commitment to “make South Holland a cleaner and *greener* district”. We must all hold them to this. It was particularly encouraging to see **Councillor Gary Taylor's** own declaration: “We need to protect our green spaces ...”

- **MP John Hayes** – for the striking policy paper he produced in his capacity as transport minister aiming to make roads and motorways not merely safe and efficient but also things of beauty. Alas, he was

reshuffled in the new parliament, and we wonder if his successor is of a like mind.

- **County Highways** again – for the provision of cycle stands outside the Library in Victoria Street.

- **SHDC** – for cleaning up the squalid dereliction of the Bull and Monkey site and fencing it off.



- **Gregg's** – for their clear, direct fascia, readable at

a considerable distance. Contrast the indecipherable clutter of signs at the Sunshine Café in Bridge Street.

- The retention of the former **Pacey's** in Red Lion Street as an independent bakery and confectioner's. It could so easily have become yet another beautician's, estate agent's, mini-market or charity shop.

NOT APPRECIATED

- The Tuesday market traders who abuse the Hall Place seating circle by incorporating parts of it inside their stall or dumping spare boxes and paraphernalia on the seats. Tuesday, 23 June, also saw boxes of produce stacked on top of the newly-planted bedding-plants in the planters.

SOCIETY NOTES

A WARM WELCOME to new members Christopher and Judith Smith, Nigel Wilkins, Frederick Bonneit, Geraldine Scholes and Arthur Ingram.

The AGM, held at the Grammar School's Business Centre on 24 March, received the reports of the Chairman, Treasurer and Planning Officer, and also heard of the exciting development of the 'Market Art' project (page 5). It was good to see quite a number of new faces, attracted by the invitation publicised in the local press to raise concerns about the town's built environment. Unfortunately, this was rather dominated by the question of litter and street drinking – which are of course more matters of current social attitudes and policing, rather than the preservation of what is valuable in our built environment and its further enhancement, which is the Society's remit.

The officers elected for the coming year were David Jones (Chairman), Marion Brassington (Secretary), Melvyn Price (Treasurer), and Committee members John Charlesworth, John Honor and Paul Wells. Arthur Ingram was later co-opted onto the Committee.

After 30 years Vivien Berry has had to resign from the Committee for personal reasons, having

held most officer positions at some time during those years – for which our grateful thanks. Her contribution will be much missed. Of recent years her energetic involvement in the 'Keep the Castle' Campaign was invaluable.

We are also sad to record the death of Sheila Robson, a very long-standing member and keen supporter, whose day job as *Lincolnshire Free Press* reporter meant that the Society's events, concerns and campaigns were sure to be well covered in the local press.

Many readers of the local press will be missing the series of paired photographs showing parts of the town as they were 50 years ago and as they are now – some places pretty well unchanged, others well-nigh unrecognisable – together with their accompanying commentary. The mystery compilers were in fact our own Marion Brassington and John Honor. Many thanks for a most interesting and valuable contribution to local knowledge.

Finally, a gentle reminder to members who pay by cheque but haven't yet paid their 2015 subscription. Please fill in the form below and send it with your remittance to Melvyn Price, 34 Avebury Gardens, Spalding, Lincolnshire, PE11 2YN.

SPALDING AND DISTRICT CIVIC SOCIETY

I enclose a cheque for:- £8 for individual membership; £12 for 2 persons in the same household;
 Free if in full-time education; Details of a standing order mandate.

Name.....
Address.....
Post Code..... Telephone..... E-mail.....

Please send to: Melvyn Price (Hon.Treasurer), 34 Avebury Gardens, Spalding, Lincolnshire, PE11 2EN.

Gift Aid:- By signing the declaration below you will enable the Society to reclaim income tax on your subscription, so that it becomes worth almost a third more at no extra cost to yourself. I wish Spalding and District Civic Society to treat all my subscriptions since 6 April 2000 and all from the date below as Gift Aid.

Signature..... Print..... Date.....

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